

Research, Plan, Vision

Training for Operations at the Joint Readiness Training Center

by Sergeant First Class John T. Miller

In the summer of 1995, D Co., 1-8 Cav was chosen to take part in light/heavy operations at the JRTC. We were told that we were the first subunit of the 1st Cavalry Division to be deployed for this training. In addition, the division had been previously tasked with the possibility of rapid deployment to Southwest Asia, especially if hostilities resumed during the cease fire with Iraq. Soon, we would find out what it meant to be fighting on two fronts simultaneously.

As we trained up for the JRTC, Saddam Hussein again began to pose a threat, and all of the elements of the division, except for our company team, deployed to Southwest Asia.

Preparing for the JRTC, we researched available doctrine and "lessons learned" publications on the use of armor in support of light infantry (LI). At the time, there was only one manual that really helped — *FM 17-18 (draft), Light Armor Operations*. No other manual addressed the armor platoon or company missions in support of the LI battalion. (See Figure 1.)

Some of these tasks could be found in our battalion and company METL. Others, like Secure an Exit Route, and Deception, were foreign to us, and not trained for execution at the platoon level. The Vietnam Studies publication, *Mounted Combat In Vietnam*, provided valuable insights into what had been done in similar theaters of operations.

The Liaison Function

The ideal liaison to the light infantry would be an armor major or captain who is a subject matter expert on armor-related issues, including its limitations and capabilities. But in our case, this role had to be filled primarily by the company/team commander and his XO. But we should not limit ourselves to just these individuals. Oftentimes, NCOs with vastly more experience, like senior platoon sergeants and first sergeants, should be included to act as assistant or alternate LNOs. While there may be a bit of an intimidation factor for a platoon sergeant

advising a light infantry brigade commander, I have yet to meet a brigade commander who did not value the insight of a senior NCO.

The liaison function needs to go both ways: information also needs to flow from top to bottom. Those performing the liaison function need to understand the LI

battalion SOP and the battalion's mission essential tasks.

Rehearsals

Mounted rehearsals are luxuries. Instead, solid drill training and SOP rehearsal is key and will help you come out on top. When you receive a FRAGO,

Light Infantry Battalion Mission/Task	Light Armor Platoon Tasks
Movement to Contact	Overwatch Attack by fire Provide mutually supporting fire Screen Provide direct fire suppression Reserve Counterattack
Attack	Maneuver as lead force Provide suppressive fires Counterattack Attack by fire Isolate an objective Security during consolidation Deceive enemy Screen Support or assault during breach Exploitation force
Defend	Deceive enemy Screening force Security force Reserve Counterattack Cover obstacles with long range direct fires
Delay	Overwatch Counterattack by fire Deception Reinforce Reserve Counterattack force
Withdrawal	Screening force Deceive the enemy Fix enemy attack Detachment left in contact (DLIC) Rear guard Reserve
Raid	Deceptions Attack by fire Secure exit routes Fix enemy force
Passage of Lines	Overwatch Reserve

Figure 1. Battalion missions and platoon tasks.

brief the mission using a terrain model, or my favorite — use playground chalk to create a terrain sketch on the tank's number one skirt to enhance the understanding of the mission, then walk it through and move out. If you don't have a drill or SOP for, let's say, perimeter defense, defense of urban terrain, or convoy security, then you need to get to work and come up with one.

Heavy Teams and Restrictive Terrain

For years, I've been telling tankers that they don't want to tangle with infantrymen in tight terrain. Of course, I always got the macho, "Yeah, right...Crunchies!" reply. But before I ever mounted our cold steel steeds, I was trained in the light infantry as an expert in killing tanks. We had more than TOWs, DRAGONS, and LAWs. We had "Eagle Cocktails," "Roasting Marshmallows" (C-4 on L-shaped attached tree limbs), Molotov cocktails, and Thermite grenades, to name a few goodies.

To the infantryman, the tank is the proverbial dragon. From my perspective, hunter-killer teams would be an armor TF commander's nightmare. Maybe heavy force commanders should consider what type of team to deploy to a LIC/OOTW environment like the JRTC, a mech co/tm vs. tank co/tm.

Between January and March 1967, a study titled "Mechanized and Armor Combat Operations in Vietnam (MA-COV)" was used to examine the combat record of that war's armored and mechanized forces. The group evaluated over 18,000 questionnaires, 2,000 reports, and 83 accounts in which battalions and larger units had participated.¹ The group found that the chief vehicle used to close with and destroy the enemy was the M113 APC, as modified with weapons and gunshields in the ACAV configuration, with its infantrymen fighting mounted. Tanks were used to maintain pressure against the enemy in conjunction with other combined arms operations, like air assault.

Over the years, we may have teased Bradley crews for being "baby tankers," but during one attempted ambush at the JRTC, we watched Bradleys dash into the woods, taking advantage of their smaller size and agility, chasing the ambush teams deep into the heavy woods.

SOP Conflict

There is no excuse for conflicts of SOPs. Train as you fight; therefore, deployed heavy teams should be those already configured in wartime OPLANS

within the brigade or battalion TF. Our company/team's rule of thumb was to establish a relationship with all our teammates. On the personal level, we invited each other to dining-ins and company or platoon parties. On the professional level, we coordinated and trained together during Sergeant's Time Training. Doing this well before any deployment will solidify actions and drills.

Modifying the Route Security Mission

The most taxing of all missions was route and convoy escort/security, as it had been in Vietnam. As General Starry points out in the Vietnam study, "Few tasks were more important than keeping the roads safe and protecting the vehicles, men, and supplies that used them. At the same time, no task was more disliked by armored soldiers."²

From the beginning, we modified the convoy escort task, using a modified strong point approach with internal road-runners, as described in the Vietnam study (Figure 2), and we treated the operation like a passage of lines. These first convoys were the supplies and materials to establish ourselves in country. At the strong point (SP), we halted the convoy to exchange information with the convoy commanders while one tank ran the route to the relay point (RP). Along the route, he called in checkpoints and sitreps. At the relay point, a second tank would run the route back. Once tank two was on the road, the convoy was released to move along the route with an escort leading. This relay would continue until the convoy cleared our area of responsibility and we passed it on to the next platoon to run similar escorts. Bradley dismounts con-

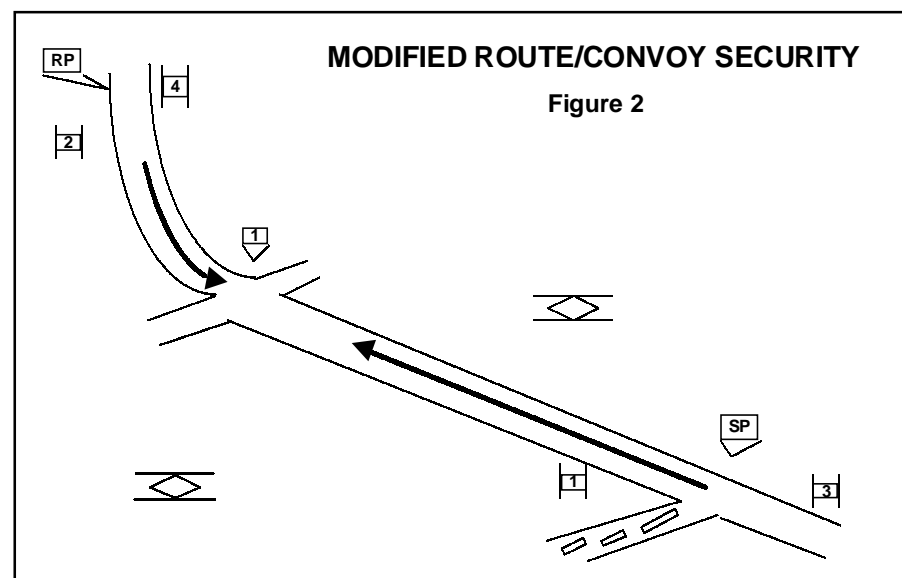
ducted patrols along the route. The results were clear, according to the AAR: the enemy was kept off balance and unable to accomplish his mission, several caches were uncovered, and we never lost a vehicle during the several sorties we ran.

Not only should the LNO ensure time for maintenance and rest, but the platoon leadership must be a pain in the grille doors when it comes to maintaining personnel and equipment. Internally, we followed the cavalry tradition: first horses, then sabers, then self. Our goal was to maintain functioning and nothing more; when pulling back into the AA, walk the track. When in your positions providing security, put the gun tube over the side and check fluids, leaks, air intakes. Stagger security responsibility, clean crew-served and personal weapons, and establish a rest plan.

Direct Fires in MOUT Environment

Urbanization. Half of all the people on the planet live in urban communities. That number will increase two-thirds by 2025. Urban combat disrupts unit cohesion, complicates control, blunts offensive momentum, and causes casualties to soar for all involved.³ Combat can be brutal but brief in villages, or lengthy and agonizing between small isolated units in cities. Tanks find themselves at a disadvantage there. Their agility is limited by narrow streets, where it is difficult to maneuver and even hard to traverse the turret. Tanks are also vulnerable when passing beneath enemy-occupied buildings unless they are buttoned up, inviting

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an ambush (hunter-killer teams train here, too). Urban combat calls for few, rather than many, tanks. This is another reason for preferring the mech company team, where Bradleys can provide close support and assist with fighting the three-dimensional war at ground level, rooftops, and subterranean places like sewers and subways. Many of these targets cannot be engaged with tank cannons because of gun tube elevation and depression limits.

In missions involving movements through and around the urban area, or direct combat with them, we have to start understanding that conventional tactics are of limited use. We must start taking into consideration the activities of the belligerents involved. Are we dealing with a revolutionary uprising, a resistance movement, or terrorism? Anyone training at JRTC will see a mix of all these activities.

Notes

¹Starry, Gen. Donn A., *Vietnam Studies, Mounted Combat in Vietnam*, (Department of the Army, Washington D.C. 1989), pp. 84-90.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 106-111.

³Collins, John M., *Military Geography for Professionals and the Public* (National Defense University Press, 1998), pp. 199-206.

References

FM 17-18, Light Armor Operations, Mar 94, Chp. 4, "Light Armor Platoon"

FM 71-1, Tank, Mechanized Company Team, appendix H

FM 7-7J, The Mechanized Infantry Platoon-Squad (Bradley), Feb 86, Chp. 2 and Appendix A.

Thompson, SFC Paul E. Jr., "Light/Heavy Integration at the Joint Readiness Training Center," *ARMOR*, Jul-Aug 98, pp. 11-12.

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